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AUTHOR Person, Mary E.; Burke, Donald M.
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ABSTRACT

A study examined growth in oral reading fluency in second, third, and fourth grade students after a treatment of intensive instruction. The 53 subjects were assigned to either an experimental or a control group, and all were administered form A of the Diagnostic Screening Test: Reading, to determine their independent reading level, instructional level, frustration level, and comprehension score. Students in the experimental group were tutored in silent reading, oral reading, and oral reading with expression for two weeks, while the control group received no special instruction. It was hypothesized that the experimental treatment would significantly change subjects' pretest and posttest scores on all levels of the screening test, and that significant changes in attitude toward oral reading and reading in general would occur. On the whole, the results did not support the hypotheses. Significant differences in reading growth were not found for the experimental group, except in the area of comprehension. (FL)

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Oral Reading in the Classroom

Mary E. Person and Donald M. Burke

Minot State College

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Running head: Oral Reading in the Classroom

Abstract

The effect of short term intensive instruction on oral reading was measured in this investigation. Students in the second, third, and fourth grades of a compus school, were tutored in silent reading, oral reading, and oral reading with expression for two weeks. The results did not show significance for the experimental treatment. The findings did show a trend toward improved oral reading and the comprehension level did significantly improve. Further expansion of the model may be necessary to achieve significant results in other areas.

Oral Reading in the Classroom

Prior to 1930, most children learned to read by the oral reading method. Articulation and pronunciation, or 'expression', were taught by imitation of the teacher-model. After the 1930's, silent reading, comprehension, and study skills became the central focus of reading instruction (Zintz, 1980).

Oral reading today is used by some teachers for diagnostic purposes. For most teachers, however, who use oral reading at all, it is the round robin method that is recommended by the teacher's manual of their basal reader (True, 1979). But, if children have no purpose for reading orally and if the material is not suitable for audience reading, oral reading is not usually a satisfying or positive experience.

Zintz (1980) noted:

> Children should have an opportunity to entertain others by their reading. But when are others entertained? Not when the reading is the wrong kind of material or the reader cannot read it well. When do children get satisfaction and security in oral expression? Only when they express themselves reasonably well. Children can get satisfaction through group participation only when giving something that the group anticipates or understands. Children get effective speech practice only when they have poise,

self confidence and the feeling that they are doing a good job.

Oral reading as the method of choice had passed out of vogue by the late 1920's due to the influence of Colonel Francis W. Parker and Dr. Edmund Huey, advanced educational thinkers of their day. Research of their day, the testing movement, as well as the general consensus that the reading process involved more than simply word pronunciation, all caused the demise of oral reading in classrooms across the United States (Smith, 1965).

Contemporary thought, however, views reading as an eclectic process, and oral reading is again finding a place in classroom instruction, although not as a primary teaching method as it was in the past. The oral reading process in today's schools is primarily advocated as a means of skill development as well as for recreation (Briggs, 1978). Teachers, while still using the skill diagnostically, are also encouraging the improvement of communication between the reader and the listener rather than always seemingly trying to catch pupils in oral miscues (Hosey, 1977).

Teachers are apparently experimenting with many widely diverse methodologies for improving oral communication in the classroom, especially in the area of oral reading. Although the sample size was small in his research, Smith (1978, 1979) advocated the use of teacher modeling as an effective tool. Another method of interest

is Reader's Theatre, a dramatic presentation in which pupils practice and read assigned material without memorization or traditional staging. Through the interpretation of theatrical roles, students gain personal confidence as well as reading fluency (Groff, 1978; Noble, 1976).

In a study by Brect (1977), the method of silent reading preceding oral reading was shown to be superior to the method of oral reading without prior practice. However, these conclusions were questioned by Sherman (1978). It would appear that preparation for oral reading may best be left as a choice for the individual teacher.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to determine growth in oral reading fluency in second, third, and fourth grade pupils after a treatment of intensive instruction for a two-week period. Growth was determined by pre- and posttesting with the Diagnostic Screening Test: Reading (Gnagey & Gnagey, 1982). This instrument was chosen because of its ease of administration and scoring, and also because it yielded grade level scores for both reading level and for comprehension. Reliability coefficients were between .85 and .98 for the test. Validity appears to be excellent for such a short, concise test.

This study was not undertaken to analyze miscues or to be in any way diagnostic. It was undertaken in order to improve fluency,

expression, and general growth in the word-calling process of second, third, and fourth grade pupils. Another consideration in the design process was to create a model for instruction that could be copied easily by the elementary teacher and implemented in any classroom without special materials or expertise. This model included both a sequence of reading (i.e. reading silently, reading orally, reading orally with expression) as well as actual suggestions for appropriate materials or procedures. Because it was set up over a two-week period, the material could be introduced as a short-term classroom unit as this study was done, or it could be used equally well in a classroom for spaced practice over several weeks or even months.

This study also fulfilled another goal for the authors: it gave the opportunity to preservice teacher candidates to administer and score standardized tests and to participate in a controlled research project.

Method

Subjects

Fifty-three second, third, and fourth grade pupils from Minot State College Campus School were used in this study. All students volunteered for the study and were then assigned to either the experimental or control groups. The mean age of the experimental group was 9 years 4 months, with a range of 7 years 9 months to 10 years 8 months. The control group had a mean age of

9 years 2 months, with a range of 7 years 9 months to 10 years 8 months. During the two-week procedure, only one of the 53 pupils dropped out of the experiment. All of the students came from a wide socioeconomic range. In the experimental group there were 11 males and 15 females; in the control group there were 15 males and 11 females.

Procedure

Each member of the experimental and control group was administered Form A of the Diagnostic Screening Test: Reading. This test was designed to yield a comfort score (independent reading level), an instructional level score, frustration level score, and comprehension score, all expressed in grade equivalents. College students from an elementary reading methods class were assigned, on a randomized basis, to administer pre- and posttests to one experimental and one control group pupil and then to work with the experimental pupil for two weeks.

On the first day of the study college students administered and corrected the standardized test and the attitudinal survey, determined the comfort level of the experimental pupil, chose a trade or library book on which they worked the Fry Readability Formula (Fry, 1977) to correspond to the pupil's comfort level.

On the second day the pupil was asked to read one story from the selected book silently. If the child had problems with vocabulary, he/she could ask the college student to explain those words. After

this, the pupil read orally to the college student, then selected paragraphs were chosen for reading with expression.

The project for the third day was to choose an older, appropriate comfort level book and to cut out paragraphs from this book. The college student then pasted the paragraphs onto pieces of construction paper, creating a cut-up story (Gilbert and Dardig, 1976). The pupil would then read these paragraphs silently, then again orally, then finally orally with expression.

A basal reader story was selected for the fourth day. Again the story was to be at the comfort level fo the subject. The child read the story silently, orally, and orally again with expression.

In order to have the child become familiar with reading in different moods, humorous sentences were dittoed by the authors, cut up, and placed in an envelope. In another envelope was a second set of cut-up suggestions for mood (e.g. angry, excited, etc.). The child was asked to choose one sentence strip and one mood strip and read accordingly. This continued for the period of instruction.

Beginning the second week, or the sixth day of the experiment, jokes, riddles, and anecdotes were given to the child to read. The joke books chosen for the pupils were on their reading comfort level. The subject read the jokes silently, then orally, and finally

orally with fluency. After practicing the jokes in a one-to-one situation, the children met in groups of approximately five where they could read their jokes and riddles to each other.

Day seven was similar to day six, except that the children and their college tutors selected a playlet or choral poem to read silently, orally, and orally with expression. The children would then gather in groups of five (all children being of approximately the same comfort level) and read their appropriate parts.

The same material as in day seven was reviewed on day eight. The subjects read their playlet to their tutor orally with expression, then formed their groups to read their material as a group. The children were also encouraged to make puppets, masks, or appropriate props on their own time for their presentation. On day nine, grades 2, 3, and 4 combined, and the children presented their recitations to other children in the school, reading their parts with fluency and expression.

The final day was reserved for posttesting both experimental and control subjects, using Form B of the Diagnostic Screening Test: Reading, as well as the posttest for the Attitudinal Survey.

Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that the treatment would significantly change the subject's pre and posttest scores on all levels of the

Diagnostic Screening Test: Reading, specifically comfort level, instructional level, frustration level, and comprehension. It was also hypothesized that the subjects would significantly change as to their attitude toward oral reading and reading in general. If the treatment were effective, no change should be seen in the control group.

Results

Table I presents the means and standard deviations for each of the major variables. As can be observed, the mean scores for the experimental group in each case shifted in a positive direction, with comprehension having the largest gain (1.79). This was not the case for the control group, as only the comfort and comprehension results indicated positive shifts.

Table II shows the results of a t-test run on the pre- and posttest scores for each of the five dependent variables. In the experimental group only comprehension with a t=-2.65 showed significance. In the control group there were no significant results evident. It would appear that only comprehension was affected by the experimental intervention. It should be noted that the experimental group's comfort, instructional, frustration, and comprehension levels all showed a greater positive gain in the t-test analysis than did the control group's scores. This was not the case, however, for the attitudinal scale.

Owing to the lack of randomization in the selection of subjects for the experimental and control groups, an analysis of covariance was used in evaluating significance between the experimental and control groups. Table III indicates that no significant difference was found between the posttests of the control and experimental groups when pretest variances were accounted for. The table indicates that the measurement for comfort level had some differences; however, the results were not large enough for significance.

Discussion

On the whole, the results do not generally support the hypothesis proposed earlier. Although an overall purview of the results does tend to indicate a positive benefit for the treatment, this benefit may have been due to some contaminating variable which was not or could not be controlled effectively by the design or by the limitations of the classroom situation.

Although significant differences in reading growth were not achieved except in the area of comprehension, the authors strongly believe that directed oral reading practice is needed in the classroom. Both the elementary pupils and the college students were enthusiastic about the project and its results. Although it does not show up in the data, the improved oral reading proficiency of the lower achieving pupils boosted their self-esteem tremendously. The

better readers were already proficient oral readers and so significant growth could not be expected for the group.

Future study is needed in several areas: a larger sample should be attempted with, perhaps, better control of the IQ variable. Also, this study was undertaken in an experimental Campus School which already individualizes instruction and whose pupils normally are subjected to considerable experimentation. If this project were undertaken in a traditional classroom, the results may have differed.

In conclusion, the authors believe that the concept of direct practice in classroom oral reading may improve overall reading level and comprehension as well as self-concept. Since this experimental design did not produce results of significance, the authors urge further examination and expansion of the model. Practice in oral fluency and oral expression is a worthwhile goal in the modern elementary classroom and new means of achieving these ends must be sought out assiduously.

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Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation Scores for the Experimental and Control Groups

Experimental	Mean		Standard Deviation	
Level	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Comfort	4.87	5.19	2.02	2.34
Instruction	5.75	5.84	2.15	2.32
Frustration	6.63	6.95	2.54	2.59
Comprehension	5.21	7.00	2.59	2.45
Attitudinal	18.19	18.26	7.29	8.90
Control	**Mean**		**Standard Deviation**	
Level	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Comfort	4.34	4.37	1.85	1.71
Instruction	4.80	4.76	1.85	1.85
Frustration	5.48	5.06	2.52	2.57
Comprehension	5.06	5.53	2.10	2.17
Attitudinal	15.43	15.07	7.67	9.22

Table 2

Pre and Posttest t Scores for the Experimental and Control Groups

Experimental Level	t Score
Comfort	-.540
Instruction	-.149
Frustration	.270
Comprehension	-2.648*
Attitudinal	.051

Control Level	t Score
Comfort	-.053
Instruction	.066
Frustration	.118
Comprehension	-.828
Attitudinal	.161

*$p > .05$

Table 3

Analysis of Covariance between the Experimental and Control Groups

Level	F
Comfort	.55
Instruction	.01
Frustration	-.35
Comprehension	-.18
Attitudinal	.00

*p>.05